



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Head of Spillover Mission to Skopje, Ambassador Carlos Pais

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
21 April 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States very warmly welcomes Ambassador Carlos Pais back to the Permanent Council. Mr. Ambassador, it was always a great pleasure to work with you during the Portuguese chairmanship and we warmly welcome you back. We also would like to acknowledge Ambassador Michael Sahlin, the EU Special Representative in Macedonia, and thank you for being with us also here this morning.

Thank you ambassadors, both of you, for your very fine reports. In response, let me begin with the following simple observation:

Macedonia is more stable and inclusive today than when Ambassador Pais last appeared before the Permanent Council seven months ago.

There are a number of reasons why we believe that is the case, but none are more important than the decision of the Macedonian people last November to vote “no” on an anti-decentralization referendum that, had it passed, would have seriously hindered implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

By rejecting the referendum, the majority of Macedonians signaled their commitment to creating an integrated, multi-ethnic, democratic country on the path of Euro-Atlantic integration. The people of Macedonia deserve our congratulations for that very forward-looking decision.

The Spillover Mission also deserves our thanks, Ambassador Pais, for the hard and the sustained work it has done to advance Framework Agreement implementation and to publicize its benefits, including decentralization. The Mission helped give local leaders and citizens a better understanding of their roles and their responsibilities in the decentralization process, and helped increase the public’s confidence in the outcome.

But Macedonia is also a more stable country today because of the improvements it is steadily making to its human rights situation.

Again, the Spillover Mission shares some credit in this regard: over the past seven months, it has done very solid work in monitoring and pressing for resolution of human rights cases, and in tracking allegations of police abuse and other shortcomings in the judicial process.

Police use of violence, we note, is at an all-time low and arbitrary arrest and prolonged pre-trial detention have occurred less frequently than in prior years. The assistance the Spillover Mission

has given and continues to give in support of community-based policing and training programs at the Macedonian Police Academy and in the field has contributed substantially to this positive development. We also urge Macedonia to continue to improve its record by consistently and promptly holding accountable law enforcement officials who are responsible for human rights abuses.

These successes, however, cannot obscure the fact that Macedonia remains in transition and faces some serious challenges.

Corruption, Mr. Chairman, remains a serious problem, negatively affecting every aspect of Macedonia's public life, undermining the legitimacy and efficacy of Macedonia's democratic institutions and undercutting respect that ordinary citizens have to have for politicians, judges, and government officials if government is to function properly. Related ills are organized crime and money laundering. To our knowledge, the Government of Macedonia has never prosecuted anyone for money laundering, although we understand there are a number of money laundering cases currently under investigation.

That is why we fully concur with Ambassador Pais' focus on assisting Macedonian judicial reform as the Spillover Mission's first priority.

Relations between and even among various ethnic groups, while improved, remain vulnerable to exploitation by extremist elements. That is why we also fully support the additional priorities that Ambassador Pais has set for the Mission to help with the implementation of decentralization in a way that strengthens inter-ethnic cooperation at the local level.

We urge the Government of Macedonia to take steps at the national, regional and local levels to root out discrimination against women and against minorities.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, adherence to the rule of law in Macedonia is inconsistent. The recent municipal elections are a clear example of this. In all three rounds, ODIHR monitors noted serious irregularities in a number of areas, particularly in western and northern Macedonia. Just as disappointing was the Government's failure to adequately address the shortcomings identified in the first two rounds. Once again, we call upon the responsible government authorities to investigate and prosecute those implicated in electoral violations and to take decisive steps to strengthen Macedonia's electoral processes and institutions.

The Spillover Mission can help by focusing on programs that develop respect for and commitment to the democratic rule of law, particularly among Macedonia's younger populations.

With regard to the size and structure of the Spillover Mission, the United States believes that the time may be ripe for the OSCE to consider phasing out the Mission's two field stations at Tetovo and Kumanovo, beginning this summer, and closing them by the end of this year. Tensions in those areas are substantially lower than they were at the beginning of 2004. Closing the two field stations will help streamline the Mission and conserve resources.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, Macedonia has made undeniable progress in recent years and months in developing democratic and market institutions and in promoting respect for human rights. But Macedonia's transformation agenda is not yet finished.

The question is not if Macedonia will join Euro-Atlantic organizations, but when. But this is a question that only Macedonia's government and people can answer by demonstrating clearly the will to push through the tough reforms that are still required. In this respect, Macedonia can count on the continued support of the United States and, I'm sure, the support of Ambassador Pais is equal here, as well as that of the committed members of the Spillover Mission, who are working together to help the country move forward along the path of integration.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.